



*From the desk of*  
**Representative Jim Moeller**

*January 2004*



**D**ear Neighbor:

**Greetings! I hope that this legislative letter finds you well — and that you and your family have gotten off to a safe and peaceful start in the new year.**

With the 2004 Legislative Session under way in Olympia, I want to bring this brief preview to your attention. Our agenda features quite a number of issues ranging over quite a spectrum of topics. My report today covers the ones that hold, at least in my opinion, the most significance for the most 49<sup>th</sup> District people.

Before I write anything else, I want to say that I appreciate your letters, e-mails, and telephone calls. Your participation in the government process is important and appreciated! Please do continue to stay in touch with me whenever you have comments or questions.

**Best wishes — and thank you so much for reading what I have to say about what's going on in *your* Washington State Legislature!**

A handwritten signature of Jim Moeller in black ink.

**Jim Moeller**  
State Representative  
49<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
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## ✓ **Our economy:**

*For Clark County families, it all starts with a decent, dependable job*

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**N**ow that we're well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems to me that it's not too much for citizens to expect a decent day's pay for a decent day's work. Those of us lucky enough to make our home in Vancouver — or in some other community in Clark County or anywhere else in Washington — are no different than Americans in general. **We show up for work on time and we follow the rules — and we shouldn't get shoved off the road at the first sign of a chuckhole on Wall Street.**

In the 2003 session, we approved business-friendly legislation — which I joined in supporting — aimed at bolstering high-technology businesses here in Clark County. One of the top economic-development measures in years involves our own Clark County region. New incentives are in place to promote growth in our semiconductor industry. And the gas-tax hike passed last session has launched a number of transportation projects around Southwest Washington — and that means jobs, in addition to shorter commutes!

But unemployment in Southwest Washington continues worse than most parts of our state — which in turn continues worse than most parts of our country. **Many people have lost their jobs. Many families are losing their health care. And many young people will lose their chance for education and training they need for jobs in this new century.**

*I believe a fair budget  
is as important as a balanced budget*

I haven't made a secret of my opposition to the new budget we adopted last year. **This budget isn't fair; it doesn't reflect our responsibility to citizens who could honestly use a hand.** For one thing: Our state shouldn't be giving tax breaks for country-club dues when so many families are having a hard time finding decent health care — or any health care! — for their kids.

This session, we'll write a much smaller, supplemental budget to reflect changes in the economy since last spring. More young people than we expected are attending our schools, for instance, and we have larger social-service caseloads in some areas. We'll consider recommendations from the second round of work done by the Washington Competitiveness Council — a group of labor, education, business, and civic leaders who have been researching ways to get our economy moving. And personally, I'll be working to bring fairness back into the budget — fairness for Washingtonians who don't spend a lot of time at the country club.

So how do you write a fair budget? **Well, it starts with encouraging economic development that features dependable jobs — the kind of jobs where people don't have to wonder every day at work if it'll be their last day of work.**

The governor released his new budget proposal a few weeks ago. Following several of the Competitiveness Council recommendations, his plan moves our state — at least in some cases — down the correct path. It's a good starting point for budget negotiations between the House and Senate. The proverbial bottom line is that our policies (and I don't care who gets credit for crafting them) should build jobs that we can count on to still be there tomorrow.

To achieve such an objective, we need budget provisions and state policies that provide:

- ◆ **Additional college enrollment in nursing and computer science — two of the fields where we're most in need of more people.**
- ◆ **Greater support for colleges and industries that rely on research-and-development work to outrace competitors in other states and nations.**
- ◆ **Better funding for worker-training *and retraining* programs.**
- ◆ **More use of apprentices in public-works projects.**
- ◆ **Stronger help for schools where students are at-risk of falling behind.**

I also intend to keep advocating for meaningful tax reform — a 21st-century change in the way our state collects money needed for essential programs and services. **It's not fair that our tax burden falls heaviest on families and businesses least capable of shouldering the burden.** (We should keep in mind, too, that a growing percentage of citizens are tumbling out of the “middle class” — so now they're obliged to carry a more cumbersome tax load.)



### ✓ **Our health care:**

*Priorities must always be the safety  
of patients and the availability of doctors*

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**L**andmark prescription-drug legislation approved last session is on the way to cutting the general cost of health care by cutting the specific cost of prescriptions. In this year's Legislature, we'll review implementation of the new program. We've also got our work cut out for us in addressing a two-front crisis in liability insurance: the lack of sufficient medical-malpractice coverage — and when coverage is available, the huge price tag for it.

Make no mistake: This discussion affects most every segment of our society — individual citizens, as well as businesses and other organizations. Certainly, the medical-malpractice issue — patient safety — is high on everyone's agenda for the 2004 session. **In my opinion, the insurance crisis requires an insurance solution.** An insurance company should justify rate hikes for doctors — just as the telephone company must justify rate hikes for telephone-users. Our House Democratic Caucus is constructing legislation to subdue this beast. Where availability is a problem (for some long-term-care providers, for instance), we're looking at the establishment of a joint-underwriting association in which the state insures providers that

cannot find liability insurance.

Also under consideration is a patient-compensation fund, which would cover claims above the minimum level of coverage purchased by health-care providers. We're also reviewing ways to make the insurance industry more accountable for its rate-setting decisions.



## ✓ **Our schools:**

*A solid education is the best estate  
that we can leave for future generations*

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**M**ore than any other time in our history, students of all ages must have good access to lifelong, high-quality instruction. It's the surest way for the youngest kids to start their school careers well. It's the surest way for older children to stay on track in their schoolwork. And it's the surest way for young adults and older students to obtain the training — and the retraining — they need to get pointed and stay pointed in the right direction.

Among other education matters this year in the Legislature, we'll discuss plans to:

- ◆ **Guarantee extra help for at-risk kids in early grades so they don't fall behind before they really even have a chance to start.**
- ◆ **Encourage parental and family involvement in a youngster's schooling.**
- ◆ **Provide further assistance for schools whose students aren't achieving the kind of skills they'll need to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**
- ◆ **Strengthen college access for low-income and middle-income citizens.**



*For more information — or to express your comments:*

**Representative Jim Moeller**

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